

Minutes
King County Rural Forest Commission
September 14, 2005
Preston Community Center

Commissioners present: Alex Kamola, Doug McClelland, Dennis Dart, Leonard Guss, Julie Stangell, Doug Schenk (for Jim Franzel), Ole Una and Lee Witter Kahn.

Commissioners absent: Doug Schindler and Jean Bouffard

Exofficio member present: Amy Grotta

Exofficio members absent: Mike Reed and Randy Sandin

Forestry Staff: Kathy Creahan, Kristi McClelland, Linda Vane and Bill Loeber.

Guests: Jeanette McKague, King County Council staff; Jeff McMorris, King County Council staff; Boyd Norton, Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WDNR); Ron Baum, Hollywood Hills Stewardship Alliance; Connie Blumen, Clint Loper; Ian Hanna, Northwest Natural Resource Group; Kirk Anderson, Northwest Natural Resource Group; Julia Larson, King County; Karen Wolf, King County Executive's Office.

Alex Kamola called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Meeting Summary

Action Items:

1. Kathy Creahan will arrange for the Rural Forest Commission (RFC) to have input on the King County Shoreline Master Program update process during the next two years.
2. Amy Grotta will further develop a proposal for a forestry education program for youth based on the input received from the RFC.

Chair Report – Alex Kamola

RFC Letter re: forest certification. The last formal meeting of the RFC was held in May. At that time the RFC discussed Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification of King County lands and developed a recommendation to the King County Executive to the effect that the County should wait and not pursue certification at this time. The recommendation was reflected in a letter sent by Alex to the Executive on behalf of the RFC. Copies of the letter and the Executive's response were made available. The Executive wrote that he supports certification, but that he agrees that it is wise to wait and hopes the RFC will continue to follow the issue.

Staff Reports

Linda Vane

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program. In a letter to Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels the RFC recommended that the Denny Triangle Transfer of Development Credits Interlocal Agreement between the City of Seattle and King County be extended. We have been notified by TDR Program Manager Mark Solitto, that a three-year extension has been signed by Mayor

Nickels. Mark extends his thanks to the RFC for their support.

RFC recruitment. There are four open seats on the RFC. Members of the RFC are requested to refer interested parties to Linda for more information or applications. We plan to fill the vacancies by the end of the year.

Kathy Creahan

Shoreline Master Program. King County is rewriting its Shoreline Master Program. In the past this was a subject of concern to certain RFC members. If the Rural Forest Commission is interested staff will arrange for someone come out and talk about the process, which will last for two to three years. Individuals or the RFC are invited to provide input as the plan relates to forest protection issues.

King County Budget. The proposal submitted to the King County Council provides for continuing the same level of staffing through 2006. We will submit proposals for the Urban Forestry Program and a forest fire awareness and protection program similar to the Tolt River Highlands project. The biggest change expected in 2006 is that the Office of Rural and Resource Programs, the section in which the Forestry Program is placed, is to be combined with another section. This reorganization is not expected to affect the Forestry Program.

Kristi McClelland

RFC Field Trip to the Tolt River Highlands. The response from staff at King County was very positive. The non-foresters who attended seem to have gained a good understand how harvesting can improve the health of the forest. Because of the newspaper article and the television interview we have had calls from landowners who are interested in thinning their trees. Some of these folks have been disappointed to learn that they do not have trees with much economic value and would have to shoulder the entire cost of thinning. County foresters are working with them to find ways to at least reduce their costs, perhaps by collaboration among neighbors.

Update on King County Rural Economic Strategy

Julia Larson, King County Rural Economic Strategy Coordinator

Julia distributed a report on the input received on forestry during three public meetings held in the month of July. At these meetings the County solicited input from citizens on rural economic development issues. Julia's office will prepare a draft rural strategy report during the coming weeks, which will be submitted to the County Council in late December 2005. Julia is still soliciting input, so RFC members or staff who have recommendations are encouraged to contact Julia.

The implementation aspects of the rural economic development project will be ongoing. At Julia's last meeting with the RFC, commissioners recommended that her office consider working with the Vashon Forest Stewards. Since then, they located two containers and a refrigerator unit for the Vashon Forest Stewards to use as storage and a wood drying kiln, respectively, in their Agren Park log yard. These are the kinds of projects that the Rural Economic Strategy staff will continue to implement in the future.

Julia's program will continue to seek partnership opportunities that have the potential to continue

the viability of forestry and agriculture. In connection with forestry, improving markets for local wood came up repeatedly, with ideas ranging from marketing to product development assistance.

Alex suggested that the County create a mechanism for helping small forest landowners deal with the myriad facets of actually harvesting and selling timber from their lands. He has observed that when people realize what they are up against as far as log markets and that sort of thing their forest thinning projects tend to fall apart. The barriers include money, which could be addressed if people were to coordinate their 5-acre sites. Doug suggested that the County draw maps of stand types, then target the landowners who have the potential to group together for a cooperative harvest. There might be incentives offered on the landscape scale for pre-commercial thinning. Len pointed out that the wood harvested and milled by small operations like the Vashon Stewards is not graded and thus can only be used for non-structural purposes. This places limits on the uses for this wood.

County Forest Lands Management Update

Benj Wadsworth, Natural Resource Lands Program

King County owns six properties that have been designated as working forest sites. The five that we will discuss today are Taylor Mountain Forest (1,825 acres), Sugarloaf Forest (285 acres), Ring Hill Forest (320 acres), Mitchell Hill Forest (426 acres) and Island Center Forest (365 acres). Stewardship plans have been completed for three of these, which are available on the Internet at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/natural/working-resource-lands.htm>. Stewardship plans are being developed for the other three sites.

The County purchased the properties to protect areas from development, to retain contiguous tracts of forested property, to keep lands in active forestry and to demonstrate environmentally sensitive, sustainable forest practices. These forests are also intended to provide buffers between commercial forestland and adjacent residential development. The properties were purchased in part to generate revenue, although none of them are particularly valuable as timber lands at this time. In the long term when managing working forests, King County intends to balance sustainable timber production with conservation and restoration of resources, and with public use.

For example, on Taylor Mountain the County intends to harvest 360 acres prior to 2008 according to the stewardship plan. The plan calls for variable retention harvesting on a 100-year rotation. The first harvest was completed on Taylor Mountain in 2004. The revenue received was much less than expected. Ultimately, any revenue received from the County's working forests goes back into the maintenance and forest management of these same lands. The constraints involved with meeting the County's objectives for balancing sustainable timber production with conservation include: low timber volumes and lack of high-value merchantable timber, recreational use, surrounding development, public access and agency budget and staff limitations.

For more information see the King County Natural Resource Lands web site at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/LANDS/natural/>.

King County Rural Stewardship Plans

Clint Loper, King County Watershed Stewardship Unit Manager

Rural Stewardship Plans are similar to farm and forest plans. They were created in order to meet the requirements of the new King County Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO) in a new and flexible way. Inherent in the program is a recognition that landowners know their property best. Rural Stewardship Plans involve a site specific approach that can provide the same level of environmental protection as regulatory standards, but with more flexibility. The plans build on other County technical assistance offerings such as farm and forest plans, basin steward services and current use taxation programs such as the Public Benefit Rating System. At this time Rural Stewardship Plans are only available for properties in the Rural Zone. There are small properties in the Forest Production District that could benefit from this type of plan, but for the time being they are not eligible. We may be able to change this in the near future.

The plans are intended for landowners that are interested in a comprehensive, long-term and site specific stewardship plan and are willing to work in partnership with KC technical staff. There are two main types of plan. In the first, no change in land use is proposed. The landowner may wish to develop a plan for their own purposes or to become eligible for a cost share or incentive program. For example, property owners who wish to enter one of the current use taxation programs must have a rural stewardship, forest stewardship or farm plan. The second type of plan is associated with proposed development. In this case the plan offers the potential to gain flexibility for CAO regulations when rural residential development is proposed.

Rural Stewardship Plans offer flexibility in the width of buffers around water bodies and priority species wildlife habitat areas and in meeting requirements for clearing and grading permits. A plan does not reduce standards for public health and safety-related issues such as: flood prone and channel migration hazard areas; steep slopes and landslide areas, critical groundwater recharge areas; requirements for buildings, wells or septic systems. If subsequent landowners withdraw, they need to mitigate for any impacts allowed by permit via the plan.

For more information contact;

Clint Loper, Watershed Stewardship Unit Manager, at 206-296-8378 or clint.loper@metrokc.gov
or Katy Vanderpool, Rural Stewardship Program Coordinator, at 206-296-8362 or katy.vanderpool@metrokc.gov.

Field Office Hours, 9:00 a.m. to noon
Black Diamond Community Center
Wednesday mornings, Aug 31 - Sept 28

Carnation Fire Station 85
Tuesday mornings, Oct 11 – Nov 8

Proposed Youth Forestry Education Program

Amy Grotta, WSU Extension Forestry Educator

The RFC has recommended that the County devise ways to raise awareness of forestry practices and eliminate negative stereotypes. To this end the County's Forestry Program and Washington State University (WSU) Extension have been discussing the potential for educating the public about the practice of forestry and possibly counteracting some of the misconceptions about forestry through a youth education program. The purpose of this presentation is to request input

from the commission on the following points:

- If the County were to sponsor or support youth education programs, what should the objectives be?
- What efforts are currently underway under the auspices of other agencies, educational institutions or community groups?
- How could the RFC be involved?

Among the recommendations of the RFC are:

- There is a lot of ignorance among the general population about forest practices and even among members of the RFC there is ignorance about the management of County forest lands. The County's land management could be a model for educating the public.
- The County should consider collaborating with a school district.
- The program should address the disconnect in people's minds between forestry and the wood products such as housing materials and paper products that everyone uses. Washington is a natural resource state, but 95% of its citizens don't know anything about natural resources.
- There is a tremendous reserve of educational materials, which the County could make available to the educational system without recreating anything.
- Forestry education presents an opportunity to introduce hands on learning while meeting the state requirement of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and Essential Academic Learning Requirements (ELR).
- An education program could include a forest management plan competition for high school students with the winning plan to be implemented on County-owned forests. Students would monitor the results of plan to understand the results of actions taken.
- Some school districts may own forest lands that would be suitable for getting high school students working in the forest.
- There are programs such as those offered by Clark County Farm Forestry, the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust and the WFPA that provide training for teachers.
- North Kitsap School District has a successful program with WDNR called Students in the Watershed, which involves monitoring the impacts of trails on streams. Kids work with WDNR scientists to set up monitoring plots and solve stewardship problems.

FSC Certification of County Working Forests: A Potential Advocacy Role for King County in Increasing the Value of Non-Industrial Forests

Kirk Hanson, Board President, Northwest Natural Resource Group; Small Forest Landowner Office, Washington Department of Natural Resources; Board member, Family Forest Foundation; tree farmer of 30 acres in Grays Harbor County and co-manager of an adjacent 60-acre tree farm

Ian said that the Northwest Natural Resource Group (NNRG) has been the primary advocate for developing the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) market in Washington since the mid-1990s. Ian said that the issue of potential certification of county land came to NNRG via county staff late last year and there was interest from the King County Executive and staff in learning more about how NNRG's program works. Ian said that NNRG has an interest in seeing King County obtain FSC certification, but also in seeing King County act as an advocate for the small landowners to get certified. During the presentation Kirk will frame the issue in terms of the

small landowner. Ian will discuss the goal of NNRG, which is to create more value for forests that are managed to the FSC standard. That value is already out there in the market place; it is a matter of connecting to it, according to Ian. NNRG sees wood products as being akin to organic agriculture where market differentiation is the key to creating additional value for products within a set of standards.

Kirk likes NNRG because they are looking for market based solutions for supporting forest stewardship. In his role as an employee of the state Small Forest Landowner Office he works mainly in a regulatory environment. As a small forest landowner he has found FSC to be the only program positioned to support him. Kirk said that NNRG uses FSC certification to directly compensate small forest landowners and bring the public into the equation as participants in sustainable forestry. We need to differentiate small forest operations in the marketplace. These small producers are very different from large industrial fiber producers. Historically, obstacles for small forest landowners getting certified include: cost, complexity and available markets.

Kirk explained that NNRG has developed a program to address these obstacles. They are promoting group certification to keep costs down. They are working in strategies to simplify monitoring and administration aspects of FSC certification. They believe there is a growing demand for local wood products and want to see local production meet local demand.

According to Kirk, NNRG wants a variety of landowner types to participate. King County could serve as a good advocate, and help support the effort over very long term by participating in a certification program. They recognize that there is only a small amount of wood coming off County lands in the near term.

Ian reviewed handouts related to costs and services offered by NNRG. NNRG recognizes that costs, especially in the short term, are a factor. They are developing strategies for lowering costs including an intern program through the UW College of Forest Resources to provide technical assistance for landowners in inventorying and monitoring. In addition, boundary marking and inventory will only be needed for the section to be harvested. And, in cases like King County forest lands where harvest intensity is low, the costs of any conditions can be spread over a period of years.

Ian explained that NNRG is taking other actions to address barriers to program participation. Landowner and primary manufacturing components are growing more slowly than FSC markets. The reasons are that the standard can be difficult to meet for some people and a perception that FSC is simply a recognition program that costs money. NNRG has developed a program to subsidize certification for the very small properties (1 to 80 acres) and perhaps for lands in the 81 to 400 acre category. NNRG is working on value added issues by direct marketing initiatives and offering workshops. The number of FSC log buyers has increased from one to seven since January 2005. According to Ian, there really are those who are willing to pay more for FSC certified products. At this time, the “green building” side of the market is actually providing most of the premiums. The large buyers are really more a market share premium. NNRG is also taking steps to provide well-trained assessors in answer to questions raised by King County.

Len asked: What do you do in those areas of the country that have no trees and what happens if your requirements for species do not match what you grow?

How do you provide the economies of scale if you are trying to match local trees to local markets? What do you do in King County where you have no sawmills at all anymore if you want to use local trees for local markets? Kirk replied that we need to look at matching up opportunities for current demand with local supply. For example, NNRG will host a tour for local architects to see examples of certified forestry and look at the types of species wood products that are coming off those lands so that they can begin thinking about how they will incorporate that wood into their structures. It is true there are no mills in King County, but we can look at Snohomish County and points south for mills within haul distance and supply distance.

Len said that is not clear what the benefit of certification would be. Kirk answered that the benefit can be understood if one looks at the alternative, which is to bring wood products from outside of the region. Kirk said this is not inherently sustainable and does not support local tree farmers. Len said that currently the U.S. imports 1/3 of its softwood requirements. If those imports stopped the price of homes would increase dramatically. Kirk replied that NNRG is not suggesting that the entire wood economy be changed, but that we should look at ways to create connections locally. According to Kirk we will always have a massive world commodity market, but NNRG wants to create a choice for local consumers. Ian added that NNRG is looking internationally as well as nationally for opportunities for market development.

Dennis asked if NNRG has given any thought to partnering with the American Tree Farm Association to allow joint certification? For example, the state of Wisconsin just certified all their small landowners under the American Tree Farm Association, which has adopted the SFI standard. Dennis said that in approaching small landowners it might behoove NNRG to consider joint certification, as a lot of large landowners do in getting joint SFI and FSC certification. Ian said NNRG is tracking that evolution of group certification and particularly the concept of attaching additional benefits, beyond market benefits to certification. Ian said that Wisconsin's model is a big driver. Wisconsin also went through a full FSC scoping and is still considering doing an FSC group as well. NNRG is in both research and visioning mode as to how joint certification might work.

Dennis commented that there is a push for certifying small landowners at the state level. Kirk replied that the NNRG stewardship plan outline is patterned closely on the American Tree Farm Association stewardship plan and at some point in the future he would like to see some reciprocity between FSC and American Tree Farm Association. According to Kirk most small landowners that are active forest managers in Washington are already members of the American Tree Farm Association and are certified through them. NNRG wants to find those landowners who are already managing to a high standard and merge NNRG's program with what they are already doing without adding more work to their plate. Dennis said that the key is to match up the standards, so that the standards of different certification programs are the same.

Dennis said that a major issue for small landowners is the additional retention levels required for certification. One of the questions that comes up repeatedly is the 15% additional basal area requirement. Can we count that in our buffers under the FSC certification standard? Ian said that the standard clearly states that 10-30% additional basal area retention is required within harvest units [so the buffer would not count]. Ian said that is one part of the standard where we need more flexibility.

Dennis asked what is the process for getting more flexibility? To him this is an important question because that is going to be one of the driving factor for a lot of small forest landowners in figuring out if they have enough unencumbered land to make certification a reasonable option. Ian explained that NNRG is not after all small forest landowners, but at first only wishes to enroll those who are already managing in concert with the FSC standard.

Boyd said certification involves added costs in the form of increased variable retention or increased buffer. Boyd added that the costs of the certification program and implementing its requirements could pose a problem for small landowners. Kirk said there is no increased cost for managing by people who are already doing it. Secondly, NNRG is working at the national level to see if there is a way to create a silvaculturally appropriate standard for the Douglas fir region. Dennis wondered about the timeline because he thinks statewide there will be a lot of changes in the way the state deals with small forest landowners, esp. in regard to certification. Dennis thinks there is a growing movement toward getting small landowners certified in some way. If NNRG is going after the ones who are already managing to the standard, how will they promote FSC to get that statewide certification? Ian responded that they are constrained to a degree by the standard, which they cannot dictate.

Doug M commented that it has been three months since the RFC wrote a letter to the County Executive [with a recommendation that the County not pursue certification at this time]. NNRG has come back and given the RFC more information and answered some questions. The County still does not know a lot about the real costs of managing its natural resource lands and the costs of FSC certification for its forestlands. While it would be valuable for FSC politically to have its land certified, he is not certain there is any value for King County in having its lands certified at this time and place. Doug M would recommend to any landowner that they look closely at the impacts and costs when considering certification. Ian said it depends on what the County's goals are. If the advocacy goal is not there at all, then he too would question the value of certification for King County forestlands.

Alex asked why the County would be an advocate for FSC certification among private landowners? Doug M added that the way the County is best able to be an advocate is in supporting groups like the Vashon Forest Stewards to be successful. The issue of FSC certification and regulations are potentially high cost items, limited benefits just when the county is trying to implement the new Critical Areas Ordinance and talk about rural stewardship planning with landowners. With all this going on this is not a time for the County to embark upon a new venture, especially one that could cost more money than it could ever provide benefit financially.

Kristi said the County's Forestry Program teaches landowners to manage their land for forest health. NNRG is trying to be market driven and she agrees with that approach. The trend now is for smaller and smaller holdings, many in the 20-acre range. When she tells these landowners about certification they ask her what the value is. They feel they are being environmentally responsible and as they are just doing a thinning, they want to know the benefit to them of going through a certification process. Ian agreed that clear incentives are needed for landowners. Kristi said the benefits of certification right now are going to the builders, not to the person selling the log. Ian replied that NNRG's role is to get that price premium so that it boils down to more money for the landowner. Ole asked what would happen if a small forest landowner were

following state rules regarding harvesting and FSC did not like what the landowner was doing? Ian said that the FSC standards drive everything. For FSC to be differentiated at the marketplace they have to hold a high standard. FSC is not intended for everybody, it is supposed to delineate a certain segment. That segment has the potential to add more value to their product.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Next meeting

The next regularly scheduled meeting is November 9, 2005, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Preston Community Center.

Staff Liaison:

Linda Vane, Forestry Program

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